

The Gate Au by JelloGirl323

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Summary: Steve and the kids get out safely and El closes the gate, leading to the Snow Ball. But what if the Mind-flayer had a different idea. Au of Season 2 Episode 9

1. Chapter 1

Title: The Gate Au

Fandom: Stranger Things

Characters: Mike Wheeler, Eleven, Steve Harrington, Dustin Henderson, Lucas Sinclair, Max Hargrove, Will Byers and the Mind flayer (*mentioned*)

Summary: Steve and the kids get out safely and El closes the gate, leading to the Snow Ball. But what if the Mind flayer had a different idea. Au of Season 2 Episode 9

Genre: Drama/Angst

Pairings: Mileven (Mike/Eleven).

Tags: My brain sucks. Mike whump. Mind flayer. Angst. Pain and suffering Ahoy! To steal a phrase 'All aboard the pain train!'

Chapter I: The Story Teller with a Heart of Gold

After setting the fire Steve and the kids fled not wanting to become demo-dog bait. As Mike ran he couldn't help but feel a little bit proud. Because he- Okay yes, the others helped- was able to draw the attention away from Eleven and Hopper. This time *he* was the one saving *her*.

Coming up to a corner Steve glanced at the map and shouted "This way!"

Before continuing either oblivious or ignoring Dustin's steady stream of curses. They followed Steve in a line with Mike coming in last. Just as he was rounding the corner Mike lost his footing and fell to the ground, thick vines wrapping around his ankles.

"Hel-" He tried to yell but was cut off as a large vine wrapped around his neck. Panicking he pulled hysterically at the vine, desperate to get it off.

Each time he thrashed it wound tighter and tighter until he was gasping for breath, and Mike watched helpless as his friends got farther and farther away. Suddenly he could hear a low growl coming from the tunnel to the side of the one that his friends had just disappeared into. Eyes wide in terror Mike watched as a demo-dog stalking towards him slowly.

'This is it. This is the end. I'm not getting out of here am I?' He thought his eyes closing tight, not wanting the demo-dog's horrifying face to be the last thing that he sees.

The growling got closer and closer until he could *feel* the putrid breath of the demo-dog. Could feel the saliva dripping onto his face as its own was opened wide in anticipation of the final blow.

-ST-

The consciousness of what the kids referred to as the 'Mind-Flayer' was very old. Very old. He did not know how old however, time had passed in a haze. Waiting to get out of the nether-world. The other dimension. The upside-down.

Months turned into years, years turned into decades, decades into centuries, centuries into millennia. On and on never-ending-until that one day. The day that there was a whole ripped open between the two dimensions. The whole was small, definitely smaller than the Great One, which was rather... irksome. But no matter. He could always send out His children.

With each life claimed, each time His offspring entered and exited the gateway it grew bigger and the Great One's hold on the other realm grew stronger.

But then...then...His daughter was killed. Killed by a *child*. This was... an unfortunate set back. But no matter, no matter. The Great One would win. It was only a matter of time. The Great One could wait- He was patient after all. And as He waited His children grew.

Grew bigger and bigger. Soon the Great One's children were numbered in the hundreds if not thousands.

The vines wound through the cracks of the ever-widening-gate. Changing the world beyond spreading and spreading through interweaving tunnels underground.

The Great One kept tabs on the *child* that had killed His daughter. He watched as the *child* left through a weak spot in between the two realms. He watched as the *child* found a home with that pesky little human with the gun who wore a star on his chest. When the *child* had left the place where the Great One and His offspring had taken up residence He was delighted. Whilst the *child* was away playing dress up He plotted. And He gained a new follower.

Will Byers...yes... that was the small human's name. The small human that had been used as a hatchery of sorts. Yes, He had deemed it prudent to use the boy as a means of getting His children into the other world.

And a good decision that had turned out to be. For as the boy's condition worsened His grip grew stronger and stronger until He was able to place a portion of Himself inside the boy.

A spy, was what the boy was called. And spy he did. Sending those irksome *soldiers* to their deaths. Something that had been coming for a long time. No one hurt His offspring and got away with it.

But then...Then the humans found out about the boy and made him sleep. Then the wretched *child* came back. And killed a number of His children too. This *child* was becoming even more of a problem and must be eliminated.

It was unfortunate that the boy had begun to lose his usefulness. Especially now that they had decided to *burn* His hold out of the boy. He could have proven useful in the endgame. But no matter, no matter, the Great One had gotten what He wanted. A way to destroy the *child*.

The fools thought that they could shut the gate. They sent the *child* to close the gate, a massive feat, to be sure.

As the *child* started on her path to close the gate with the gun-carrying-star-wearing human the Great One felt a thrill of

anticipation. One way or another He would destroy that *child* and then the path would be clear.

Then the smaller humans and one not-so-small human had to go and make Him angry. They *dared* use fire against His vines and consequently His offspring. They would pay for this grievous mistake.

Sending a group of His children to dispose of the humans He directed His attention to the *child* and her companion who were attempting to close the gate. He bent down, coming face to face with this wretched *child*. Feeling a faint sense of amusement as He registered her fear.

Humans truly were pathetic.

Though some prove to be more interesting than others. Will had been interesting, to have had survived that long inside the netherworld. The gun-carrying-star-wearing human was also interesting in a 'pest' sort of way. Like some might find a bug fascinating.

The *child*, although interesting in the fact that she had powers, was far too much of a pest for the Great One to take much more of an interest other than how to kill the little whelp.

And so, the Great One watched with contempt at this small little thing that thought she could foil Its plans.

The *child* paused for a brief moment before a serious look covered her face. She held up a hand and the Great One could feel the power rising out of her and into the air. Slowly the gate started to inch close.

This would not do. Sending a thought-command to the vines in the tunnels that the small humans and the not-so-small human had fled down He waited until the storyteller with-a-heart-of-gold was behind the others. Perfect.

The *child* wanted to close the gate? How can she when what she loves most is His grasp?

-ST-

The blow didn't come.

Mike's eyes flew open as he realized that the demo-dog hadn't killed him yet. He looked at the hulking thing that was, literally, inches from his face with a mixture of terror and confusion. Why did it stop? Why wasn't he dead yet? Not that he *wanted* to be dead per se but he just couldn't understand *why*.

The demo-dog took a big sort of sniff (did it even have a nose?) and wiggled in what seemed to be excitement.

Before Mike could do much beyond stare in terror the demo-dog bent forward and *gently* bit into the vines that surrounded Mike's neck. The vines withered and tightened but the demo-dog kept biting into them until finally his neck was free and he could *breathe*.

Taking large gulps of air Mike massaged his neck looking at the demo-dog in astonishment. Glancing the yellow stripe on its back Mike realized who it was.

"*Dart?*" He whispered in shock. His throat felt like sandpaper.

Dart's but wiggled happily at the sound of his name. Mike stared at the demo-dog still reeling from the shock of what just had happened. But before he could do anything more there was a loud growl, a blur of grey, a pained yelp from Dart and then he was pinned under the weight of a demo-dog.

A demo-dog whose claws were currently digging into his chest. Bringing a pained cry from his throat. '*So, this is what Bob felt like.*' He thought as his chest burned with pain.

Dart raced forward to tackle the demo-dog sending both of them flying. While this was good because the demo-dog was off of his chest, it was also *freaking painful* to have his chest ripped open as the demo-dog flew away.

"*Mike!*"

Mike looked frantically towards the tunnel at the sound of his friends' shouts.

"H-here." Mike called his voice more of a croak. Mike tried to clear his throat but descended into a coughing fit. Once he could breathe

somewhat normally he tried again. "Here!"

This, whilst getting the attention of his friends, had the unfortunate effect of gaining the attention of the rouge demo-dog who had just knocked Dart into the wall.

Growling lowly, it advanced forward and wrapped its jaws (vine-mouth?) around Mike's arm and dragged him down the tunnel. Mike screamed again, for the pain was excruciating. It felt as if the bite had snapped his arm in half. Judging by that snapping sound it probably did.

"Mike! *Mike!*"

The voices of his friends were getting closer but the demo-dog was too fast, racing down one of the many tunnels dragging Mike along with it.

"Dustin! Lucas!" Mike yelled sobbing as he felt the demo-dog's teeth dig deeper with every bump and turn they made. "Help me!"

-ST-

Steve, Dustin, Lucas and Max ran down the tunnel back to where they had first come in. Just as they were rounding the corner Dustin yelled for everyone to stop.

"Where's Mike?" Dustin's voice trembled slightly and everyone paled looking around for the missing teenager.

"Mike?" Lucas called looking down the tunnel where they had just come from. "Mike this isn't funny!"

"Shh!" Max said sharply. "Listen!"

They all fell silent and felt a thrill go down their spine. The sound of a demo-dog's cry echoed throughout the tunnels. Followed shortly by a pained cry. This one all too human.

Dustin and Lucas exchanged horrified glances.

"MIKE!"

With that they took off towards their friend. Never mind the fact that they didn't have any weapons or ways to protect themselves. Their friend was in trouble and they would do anything in their power to save him.

Steve and Max both swore and took off after them. Steve's long legs making it easy for him to get to the front, holding his bat tightly.

"Here!"

There was a sickening crunching sound and Mike screamed again causing them to run faster, Dustin and Lucas sobbing at the sound of their friend in pain.

"Mike! *Mike!*" They called their hearts pounding in time with their feet.

"Dustin!" Mike screamed and Dustin choked on a sob at the fear and pain in his friend's voice. "Lucas!"

Lucas, likewise, was also sobbing at the sound of his best friend in such pain.

"Help me!"

Rounding a corner, they paused in horror at the sight before them. There was a demo-dog that stood over a large pool of blood its leaf-like snout covered in it. *Mike's blood*. Sensing their arrival, it splayed open and hissed in warning, before it sniffed the air as if smelling something.

Spying the yellow stripe going down its back Dustin felt his heart drop. "*Dart?*" He breathed coming out in front of Steve. "H-hey buddy...It's me Dustin. Remember me? Will you let us pass?"

Dart hissed again causing Dustin to gulp slightly before steeling himself when he heard another scream from Mike. "Okay...okay I'm sorry. I'm sorry about the storm seller. That was a douchey thing to do." Dustin said trying to keep his voice calm.

Dart gave a happy sounding growl before beginning to sniff Mike's blood again. After a second Dart seemed to nod before turning down

a tunnel and started to run.

"What...just happened?" Max whispered her voice tight.

Before anyone could say anything, Dart was back and cocked his head making a curious chuffing noise. Dart looked back down the tunnel just as there was another far-off cry from Mike then turned back to the group and whined softly.

"Holy Sh-" Dustin breathed in shock. "I think Dart wants us to follow him."

"Yeah, so he can eat us!" Steve said his voice verging on the edge of hysteria.

Dustin ignored him and looked at Dart. "Dart? Buddy? Can you take us to Mike?"

Dart made that chuffing noise again before taking off down the tunnel. Dustin raced after him with a yell of "Come on guys! Let's go save Mike!"

After a shared disbelieving glance, the rest of the group took off after him.

-ST-

The Great One stretched a long wispy arm forward through the gate. Once through He spoke, projecting His words directly into the human's minds.

"Cease now child if you ever wish to see your love again."

Both the *child* and the gun-carrying-star-wearing human froze. It seemed that they did not realize the Great One could communicate. Fools.

"What the-?" The gun-carrying-star-wearing human breathed his eyes wide in shock.

The *child* didn't pay him any mind and glared right at the Great One, a fire in her eyes. "What do you mean?" She demanded, her back

ramrod straight.

"The storyteller with a heart-of-gold. The loyal one. Mike." The Great One said His voice dripping smugness.

"You lie!" The *child* yelled her eyes widening at her love's name.

"INSOLENCE!" The Great One roared causing both humans to flinch back in pain and surprise. *"I do not lie child. See for yourself."* With that the Great One connected the puny humans to His children.

Vision

Mike Wheeler was spread-eagled on the ground by vines wrapped around his wrists and ankles. Deep claw marks adorned his chest and one of his arms looked horribly mangled, the bone clearly broken. Ugly thick bruising wrapped around his neck like a tie. His brown eyes were wide with terror and pain as he stared at the demo-dogs that surrounded him.

A demo-dog stepped forward leaf-like mouth open wide with a hiss. With a lightning fast strike, it bit into Mike's shoulder of the injured arm. Mike screamed writhing in pain. The demo-dog stepped back and another one took its place. Again, and again the demo-dogs would bite random parts of the poor boy's body then step back to let the next one have a turn.

"El..." Mike sobbed, eyes pinched with pain and sorrow. *"I'm sorry El."*

After one particularly painful bite Mike screamed "ELEVEN!"

Then everything went black.

JG: Wellp. Yeah... I did this... blame my brain. Sorry.

2. Chapter 2: Aftermath

Chapter II: Aftermath

Jim Hopper didn't know when exactly he had signed up for all of this crazy crap. But apparently, he had and now he was neck deep in it. Standing next to the telekinetic girl that trouble seemed to follow around like a lost puppy he wondered how everything had gotten so bad so fast.

It seemed as if just yesterday he and Joyce were sharing a cigarette and leaning against his truck and now here he was down a giant hole staring at a split in the universe with a thirteen-year-old kid standing next to him ready to risk it all to save her friends.

And the whole world for that matter.

When the big ugly shadow monster-what was it that the boys called it again? Oh right, the Mind Flayer. Stupid name if you asked him, but whatever works- reared its ugly head Hopper had to take a deep breath to steady himself. Because that thing was freaky looking. It gave him the heebie jeebies just thinking about it.

El seemed to brace herself, her shoulders setting and she rose a hand and concentrated on closing the gate. Hopper gripped the gun in his hands tighter and kept an eye out for any more of those demo-dogs. *'Stupidest name if I ever did hear one'* Hopper thought to himself smothering a snort at the memory of Dustin's enthusiasm while explaining his play on words.

Slowly the gate started to close. Which seemed to agitate Mr. Shadow-monster, if the long wispy arm-like thing that had stretched out towards them meant anything. Once the shadow-arm passed through the gate a loud and deep voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once.

"Cease now child if you ever wish to see your love again."

Hopper and El both froze, eyes wide shock.

"What the-" Hopper swore as he stared at the giant shadow-monster in stupefied-horror.

El ignored him and glared right up at the monster. A dangerous look in her eyes. "What do you mean?" She demanded.

"The storyteller with a heart-of-gold. The loyal one. Mike."

Hopper felt his face grow pale at the name of the Wheeler kid. If what the monster said was true, then Eleven was going to go ballistic.

"You lie!" El yelled her eyes wide with fright at the thought of Wheeler being in trouble.

"INSOLENCE!" The Mind Flayer yelled and Hopper had to wince again at the sheer anger and power radiating from the beast. *"I do not lie child. See for yourself."*

Hopper swore as his vision went black for a second before focusing again on a sickening scene.

Michael Wheeler was spread-eagled on the ground by vines wrapped around his wrists and ankles. Deep claw marks adorned his chest and one of his arms looked horribly mangled, the bone clearly broken. Ugly thick bruising wrapped around his neck like a tie. His brown eyes were wide with terror and pain as he stared at the demo-dogs that surrounded him.

"Son of a-" Hopper muttered feeling a pit in his stomach. Seeing the boy's face twisted in pain like that made him think of his daughter and it wasn't a happy comparison.

"Mike." El whispered the hand that was still stretched outward started to shake.

A demo-dog stepped forward leaf-like mouth open wide with a hiss. With a lightning fast strike, it bit into Mike's shoulder of the injured arm. Mike screamed writhing in pain.

El screamed as well and Hopper felt his heart twist at the sheer amount of pain in the sound. His own hands were clenched into fists so tight it was a wonder that he hadn't broke the skin yet.

The demo-dog stepped back and another one took its place. Again, and again the demo-dogs would bite random parts of the poor boy's body then step back to let the next one have a turn.

With each bite El seemed to break just a little bit each time. Her lips bloody from where she had bitten hard enough to draw blood.

Hopper's own hands ached with how tightly he was clenching them.

"El..." Mike sobbed his eyes pinched with pain and sorrow. "I'm sorry El."

Hopper's eyes widened and he looked at El not knowing, but having a pretty good guess, on how she would take this.

The sheer amount of pain, sorrow and love in her eyes took Hopper's breath away.

After one particularly painful bite Mike screamed "ELEVEN!"

With the sounds of the boy's screams echoing in his ears the weird vision thing ended. Hopper shuddered at the amount of pain the poor child was in.

"You hurt Mike!" Eleven yelled her voice raw with both power and pain.

"No child I killed him." The Mind Flayer's voice seemed deeply satisfied at seeing the pain It had caused.

With a powerful scream Eleven thrust both hands outward and focused on closing the gate. Pushing past the fatigue and sorrow she felt she channeled the burning rage from within her and *willed* the gate to close. So great was her focus that she didn't realize when she had started to levitate.

Hopper noticed though, and he was in awe at the amount of power this little girl held. But his focus was quickly turned to the demo-dogs that had appeared climbing the walls. A few of them looked like they still had blood on them and, channeling his own anger, Hopper started shooting the beasts down.

'This is for you kid' He thought, his gut tightening in sorrow at the

look of wonder that had always shown in Wheeler's eyes. If he could take out the beasts that had taken that boy away then he was happy to do so.

With a final ear-splitting scream, the gate closed; which in turn cut off the demo-dogs from the hive-mind, causing them to fall to the ground motionless.

"Mike. *Mike*." El sobbed as she fell to the bottom of the lift thing they were on. "Don't leave me. You promised. *You promised!*"

"Oh kid," Hopper breathed pulling her towards him. "Shh, it's going to be okay."

"No, it's not...Mike's gone... nothing will be okay." El sobbed into his chest.

-ST-

Dustin, Lucas, Max and Steve raced down the tunnel after Dart desperately hoping to find their friend before it was too late. It tore at them to hear Mike scream for them to help but not being able to.

Dustin's heart felt like it had been ripped out of his chest and put through a blender at the sound of his friend's pained cries. Mike had always been there for him, always there to make sure he was okay. Heck he had even jumped off a cliff to save him from getting his teeth knocked in. To hear him be in such pain and not be able to do anything to stop it was nothing short of torture. Guilt gnawed at his insides, inwardly beating himself up for not keeping a closer eye on his friend. For not making sure Mike was with them.

Lucas felt like each cry from his best friend was a physical blow and it was all he could do to keep himself going and not just crumpling to the ground in a sobbing heap. Mike was his first friend, his *best* friend, and now he was in pain and there was nothing... *nothing* Lucas could do to stop it. He, like Dustin, felt guilty as well. But for more than just not watching his best friend and making sure he stuck with the group. He was remembering all the words he said to Mike in anger about his being stuck up on Eleven. For him ignoring his friend to spend time with Max.

Max, although not as close with Mike as the other two, still felt horrible at hearing the sounds of his pain. She knew that he hadn't liked her intruding on the 'party' without being asked, and felt like she was taking Eleven's spot but she had just wanted him to like her. To be his friend and see how 'amazing' and 'awesome' Mike Wheeler was. She just hoped that they would get to him in time.

Steve, like Max, wasn't as familiar or close with the youngest Wheeler. That still didn't stop his stomach twisting in both guilt and anguish at the sounds of pain coming from the boy. Guilt, because he was supposed to *protect* them. *'Yeah, and you're doing an amazing job at that'* He thought his fists clenching tightly around his bat. Anguish, because the amount of pain that the boy was in tore at his heartstrings and he wished he could take the pain away and make sure that Mike would never feel pain again. No one should go through that much pain. *No one.*

The good news was... they were getting closer to Mike. The bad news; his cries were getting louder and more gut-wrenching. Especially when he started *apologizing*.

After turning *another* corner, they all froze at the sight before them staring in wide-eyed horror.

Mike was sprawled out on the ground his arms and legs secured by the blasted vines and a ring of demo-dogs were taking turns in biting him.

"*ELEVEN!*"

Dustin couldn't take any more of this and with a cry of "Hey bastards! GET OFF OF MY FRIEND!" he leapt forward and full on rugby tackled the nearest demo-dog. Dart followed Dustin's lead and started tearing into the demo-dogs. Not even pausing to think about it Lucas and Max both bolted forward to tackle their own demo-dogs. Steve, of course, was using his bat and started swinging. Vision turning red in his anger at the fact that one of his charges was hurt.

The demo-dogs didn't like that their meal had been interrupted and so they fought back with equal ferocity. Each side got a few good swipes in but the kids had something to fight for so they had the

edge. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, but was probably just a few minutes, the demo-dogs were dead or gone away to other parts of the upside-down. Dart had saved Mike's life once again but paid the ultimate price for it, as his siblings turned on him and tore him to pieces.

Once Steve was sure there wasn't going to be anything jumping out at them he started to hack away at the vines that were currently tying Mike down.

Dustin and Lucas both rushed forward to sit by their friend.

"M-Mike" Dustin sobbed as he took in the full magnitude of his friend's injuries. "It's g-gonna b-be okay buddy. We're here now. We got you."

Mike's body was wracked with sobs. "Dustin. It h-hurts."

"Shh, you're going to be okay. Don't talk." Dustin said through his sobs before looking up at Steve. "Help him...Please!"

Steve's face, still beat up from the fight he had, looked beyond pained at the state of the boy laying in front of him. Gritting his teeth, he knelt down next to Mike. "This might hurt kid," He warned before gently scooping the boy into his arms, wincing at the whimpers that this action caused. Once he was situated he stood up and looked at the tear-stained faces of the kids. "Let's get out of here before they come back."

With no further protest from the kids they ran, as fast as they could with Steve holding a practically unresponsive Mike, as they could.

Max, who had taken charge of the bat, and Lucas-who had the map-took the front leaving Dustin and Steve in the back.

They navigated the tunnels as fast as they could, being careful of the vines which tried to trip them. After one last corner they could see where they had come in.

Thirty feet.

Twenty-five.

Twenty feet.

Steve's chest was ached with the strain of carrying a thirteen-year-old kid for so long, and also because with every step Mike would let out a pitiful whimper. "We're almost there kid. Hold on. Hold on kid." He whispered daring to take a brief glance at the boy in his arms.

Fifteen feet.

"Hold on Mike, please. Please don't die on me buddy. Please." Dustin whispered his hand reaching out to clasp Mike's.

It was at ten feet that everything had started to go screwy. There was an outbreak of screeches from a horde of demo-dogs heading towards them. Panicked they doubled their pace until they reached where they had left the rope. Passing Mike to Dustin Steve helped Max and then Lucas up the rope. Once they were stable enough he turned and grabbed Mike from Dustin -wincing at the pained cry that the boy gave- but couldn't do much else before the horde was upon them.

Strangely though, the demo-dogs didn't do anything other than rush past them wholly focused on getting somewhere.

"El..." Mike breathed his pained eyes widening. He started to weakly struggle to get out of Steve's arms.

"Hey...Shh. No stop moving kid, she'll be okay." Steve said frantically trying to calm Mike down before the boy caused him to lose his grip. "Dustin help me."

"Mike calm down," Dustin pleaded looking at his friend trying to calm him. "El's going to be okay. She's a superhero remember? But you're not if you keep squirming like that so calm down before Steve drops you." Mike looked at Dustin then nodded ever so slightly before going limp.

"Hey no... none of that. Mike open your eyes."

Mike's eyes fluttered and finally, after an agonizing moment of tense silence, they opened. "M'here." He slurred. "M'wake."

"Guys is everything okay?" Lucas called down worry in his voice.

"What's taking so long?"

"Yeah, just peachy. Get ready to pull Mike up." Steve called up. He turned to Dustin. "Alright you're going to have to help me with him."

Dustin nodded looking eager to help his friend. "Alright what do I do?"

"Alright grab the rope and tie a bowline on a bight knot." Steve directed as he set Mike back down as carefully as he could.

"A *what*?" Dustin asked looking beyond confused.

Steve sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose...before wincing sharply at the pain of his still broken nose. In all the excitement and drama, he had forgotten about his own injuries. Breathing through the pain he turned back to Dustin. "Fine, a figure eight knot do you know how to tie one of those?"

"Yeah!" Dustin said grabbing the end of the rope and started to tie the specified knot making sure to do his absolute best so that it wouldn't come undone and hurt Mike even more. Once he had double checked that it was tied properly he held it up for Steve to examine. After getting a nod of approval, he helped Steve get Mike secured enough so that he wouldn't fall out.

"Okay, pull!" Steve yelled whilst he tried to boost Mike up on his end.

After many grunts and much swearing they were able to get Mike up and out of the hole. While Lucas checked to see if Mike was stable Max dropped the rope so the others could climb up.

Once they were all top-side Steve picked Mike up again and started for the car. "Come on! We need to get him to the hospital asap."

The rest of the kids didn't need to be told twice. They raced towards the car, Dustin and Lucas helping Steve get Mike in the car and making him comfortable. The three friends were in the back with Mike practically laying across both Lucas and Dustin's laps. Max took shotgun and Steve was at the wheel.

Just as they were turning onto the main road the headlights in the

car brightened so suddenly that Steve had to pull over so that he didn't crash the car. It stayed bright for a few minutes before dimming to more tolerable levels.

"Eleven." Mike said his breath hitching before falling completely unresponsive.

"No-no-no-no." Dustin said his voice verging on the edge of panic.

"What's going on back there?!" Steve demanded, stepping on the gas so suddenly that everyone jolted.

"He went unconscious! I don't even know if he's still breathing!" Lucas said hysterically frantically trying to get Mike to wake up

Steve swore and put more pressure on the gas. Willing the car to go faster.

Dustin, who was keeping up a steady stream of swearing, was also trying to get his friend to wake up. Max looked on anxiously, desperately hoping that Mike would be okay. They had all been through so much together and he couldn't leave now. Not when Eleven just came back into his life.

After breaking about fifteen laws and speed limits Billy's stolen car screeched to a halt outside the hospital. Leaving the car in park Steve got out and quickly grabbed Mike, his worry heightening at the lack of response from the boy. Not even a whimper.

Bursting through the doors he yelled for someone to help him. Two doctors rushed over with a gurney and helped him get Mike situated babbling medical jargon the whole time before wheeling him past two swinging doors and down the hall out of sight.

"S-Steve? Is he going to be okay?" Dustin asked his eyes welling up with even more tears.

-ST-

Hopper had to carry Eleven out of the facility after she had passed out due to the exhaustion and sorrow that she was currently feeling. After getting her situated Hopper went around to the driver's side of

his truck and bowed his head against the glass mourning innocence lost.

"I blame you! I BLAME YOU!"

"Nothing about this is okay!"

"You're a liar! Liar! Liar"

A pained grimace came upon the sheriff's face as he thought of the amount of pain that boy saw in his young life. Far more than anyone should have. It just wasn't fair. Taking a deep breath, he got in the truck and pulled out of the parking lot of a building that he would be happy to never see again in his life.

"Mike." Eleven muttered in her sleep, face twisting in pain. "Mike no. No. Mike. MIKE." With a gasping sob the girl startled awake and looked around in a panic.

Quickly pulling over to the side of the road and putting the truck in park Hopper leaned over and pulled El into a hug his heart breaking for the girl. "Shh...kid It's okay."

El looked up at him, her eyes dark and pained. "Nothing about this is okay. Mike's gone."

Hopper's heart clenched at hearing those words again. He let out a shuddering breath and kissed the top of her head. "I know. I'm sorry kid."

"I need to see him." Eleven's voice broke slightly on the last word. "Please."

"Of course." Hopper said giving her a comforting squeeze. "They'll be at the hospital most likely."

With that said he put the car in drive and started for Hawkins' hospital. If he drove a little faster than the speed limit...well, he was the sheriff and it was sort of an emergency... regardless he got to the hospital in record time. Eleven was out of the door before he even put it into park.

He was just about to get out of the car when he remembered the others in their little group. They didn't know.

Gripping the steering wheel tightly he groaned. *This is going to go well.* With a heavy sigh he picked up his CB radio and hoped that they could hear him.

"Joyce, this is Hopper. Do you copy?"

There was a moment of static before Nancy's voice came on. "What's going on chief?"

Hopper winced, the girl's voice was breathless with relief and triumph. He didn't want to ruin her happiness but knew that she needed to be told. It was her brother after all. "Listen...something happened. Meet us at Hawkins' Central."

"What's going on?" Nancy's voice had a little tremble of fear. "Is it El? Is she hurt? Mike's not going to be happy if she's hurt."

Hopper's breath hitched at the kid's name. "No, it's not El."

"Oh good." Nancy breathed out in relief. "Then who is it? You're not hurt, are you?"

"No...no I'm fine." Hopper found himself saying even though he knew that he was far from fine. "It... it's Mike."

There were a few minutes of static and Hopper feared the worst. Finally, someone came on the line. It was Joyce. "Hop, what's going on? Nancy just started sobbing and raced out the door. What did you say to her?"

"Joyce...something happened...with Mike." Hopper said his voice pained.

-ST-

Nancy Wheeler watched with a smile as the Byers huddled together basking in the triumph and happiness of Will being free of the Mind Flayer's awful clutches. It was over. The gate was finally closed (if the lights going super bright for a few minutes meant anything) and

everything worked out.

Then why did she have an unsettled feeling in her gut?

"Joyce, this is Hopper. Do you copy?"

Nancy looked at the radio and the feeling in her stomach heightened. "What's going on Chief?" She answered, smiling at Jonathan when he looked over at her.

"Listen...something happened. Meet us at Hawkins' Central."

Nancy's hand tightened around the radio and she felt her face pale. "What's going on?" She demanded, her voice trembling a little.

"Nancy what's wrong?" Jonathan asked looking at her in concern.

Nancy waved him off and continued the conversation. "Is it El? Is she hurt? Mike's not going to be happy if she's hurt."

By now both Joyce and Jonathan were looking at her, faces pinched in concern. Will had perked up a little bit at the name of his best friend.

Hopper's voice sounded pained. "No, it's not El."

Nancy breathed out a sigh in relief. That was good. Mike didn't need to worry over her any more than he already had. "Then who is it? You're not hurt, are you?"

"Nancy what's going on?" Jonathan asked again getting up and walking over to her.

"No...no I'm fine." Hopper said even though he sounded far from fine. There was a tiny pause and Nancy felt the dread in her gut tighten. "It... it's Mike."

Nancy's mind froze and distantly heard the thump of the radio hitting the floor as it slipped through her numb fingers. '*No. Not Mike. Not Mike.*' Her mind repeated these words like a prayer as she found herself rushing towards the door and out to the car. Heedless of the shouts behind her.

This was not happening. This wasn't happening.

She already lost Barb...she couldn't lose her brother too.

"Nance?" Jonathan's soft voice startled her as she hadn't heard him follow her. "What's going on?"

"M-Mike." Nancy said her voice cracking with the pain at the thought of losing her brother.

"What about Mike?" Jonathan asked looking concerned. "Is he okay?"

Nancy looked up at him, his features blurred from the tears in her eyes. "I don't know. Hopper said something happened to him."

"Then let's find out." Jonathan said holding up the keys.

-ST-

Steve reached over and pulled Dustin into a hug. "I don't know kid. I just don't know." He whispered into Dustin's hair, squeezing the boy tighter when he had started to sob again. Lucas and Max came over and joined the hug each of them breaking down at the thought of losing their friend.

After a few minutes Steve broke away from the group hug and told them to all sit down before they fell and that he was going to the bathroom.

Turning on the sink Steve scrubbed at the blood still coating his hands wanting to get the crimson stain, and all that it signified, off. Once he had practically rubbed his hands raw he splashed some water on his face, his tears blending in seamlessly. His hands gripped the sides of the sink in a white knuckled grip as he practically *prayed* for Mike to be okay to make it through this. Eyes closed so tight he was seeing stars he bent forward, his forehead almost resting on the sink's edge.

He just felt so guilty. It was *his* fault that Mike was out there somewhere fighting for his life on an operating table as the doctors and nurses tried everything in their power to keep him alive. If Mike didn't get through this okay Steve didn't know what he'd do. Didn't

know how he could live with the guilt.

"S-Steve?"

At the small voice behind him Steve opened his eyes and spun around to face Dustin. As their eyes met Steve felt a little bit of him die at the sight of sheer pain that was in this thirteen-year old's eyes.

"Yeah?" Steve asked his voice a mere croak. "Did you need something?"

Dustin fidgeted slightly looking lost. "I just... you weren't..." He trailed off biting his lip before bringing his head up again to look at Steve. "Will...will you sit with us? Please?"

Steve's heart twisted again at this statement. "Of course. Come on let's go find the others and wait for news."

With that the odd duo went back to the rest of their little group and waited for whatever news would come.

"What are we going to tell his parents?" Lucas moaned hiding his face in his hands. "Oh no. What are we going to tell Nancy?"

Steve felt a swooping sensation in his stomach at the sound of his ex-girlfriend's name. What were they going to tell her?

Dustin swore suddenly. "What are we going to tell El?"

Everyone winced at this thought. Not wanting to be the one to have that conversation. El was freaking *scary*.

"Are you here for Michael Wheeler?" A doctor asked coming up to the group and giving them a critical once-over.

"Yes." Lucas and Dustin said in unison. "Is he okay?"

The doctor's face fell slightly. "We did all we could. I'm sorry but he's gone."

"No." Dustin breathed falling backwards against Steve in horror.

"Mike." Lucas sobbed crumpling to the ground "MIKE"

Steve clutched Dustin like a lifeline as his eyes blurred, filling with tears. Max was also crying but comforting Lucas as best she could.

Just then there was a commotion over by the entrance that drew both Steve and the doctor's eyes. Eleven strode in her eyes sweeping the room before landing on the little group. Steve shivered as he met her eyes. They looked so empty and lifeless.

"Dustin..." Steve whispered trying to get the boy's attention. "Look."

Dustin pulled his head from where it was buried against Steve's chest and turned to look at his friend. "Eleven!" He cried his voice cracking mid-way through the word. He shook free of Steve's embrace and started towards his friend.

Eleven raced forward and met him halfway. They both clung together tightly Dustin sobbing and muttering under his breath about how he was sorry, and it was all his fault.

"What happened Harrington?" Hopper's gruff voice startled Steve out of watching the heartbreaking sight before him.

"Demo-dogs..." Steve muttered feeling the adrenalin finally start to wear off. Stumbling backwards he collapsed into the chair that he had previously vacated. "They...they got Mike. We were too late."

Hopper swore, his face paling as he remembered the vision thing that both he and El had. He clapped a hand on Steve's shoulder and squeezed briefly.

"I'm so sorry Chief, I tried so hard to get him back here in time, but I just couldn't. There was so much blood..." Steve's voice trailed off and he clenched his eyes shut trying to get that image out of his head.

Hopper winced as well knowing what the boy was talking about. Before he frowned. "Why were you anywhere near demo-dogs anyway?" He asked his voice sharp.

Steve flinched at the sound and hastened to explain. "They wanted to draw attention away from you guys so that El could close the gate

quicker. I told them forget it that we were staying put but then Billy showed up and-"

"Wait...who is Billy?" Hopper demanded looking at the boy sharply.

"My brother." Max's small voice took both by surprise as they hadn't realized that she had been listening in. Dustin and Eleven had come back to sit down without either of them realizing. Eleven was hanging on their every word.

Max gulped slightly at the fact that she now had everyone's undivided attention. "He attacked Lucas and beat the crap out of Steve."

Steve winced at the memory and leaned his head in his hands not wanting to see the judgement on anyone's faces.

"Max stabbed him in the neck with a syringe though!" Lucas said with a tear-stained smile. "It was awesome."

"We drove to the spot where you first broke through," Dustin spoke up his voice hoarse from crying. "M-Mike had a plan to torch the graveyard place where Mrs. Byers found you. Everything was going fine until..." His voice trailed off biting his lip before taking a deep breath and continuing. "Until we started to leave. As we were heading back Mike...he fell behind. The minute we noticed we started back for him, but we were too late...a demo-dog got him and dragged him off into a secret underground cavern or something. Th-the vines were holding him down and-" His voice broke and he dissolved into fresh sobs at the memory of seeing his friend in such a position.

El too was sobbing, her head bowed in grief. She looked physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted.

"El," Max spoke up suddenly causing the brunette to look at her with dead eyes. "His last words were your name. He loved you very much. I am so sorry."

Eleven flinched remembering Mike screaming her name. That he told her that *he* was sorry. This was all her fault. Mike had always been there, even if he hadn't been physically, he was always with her. He

had been there to explain things to her; to be the one that first truly accepted her for who she was, faults and all. He was her first friend. Her first love.

And now he was gone.

He who had waited and called her every night *every single night* for three-hundred-and-fifty-three days, who taught her what friendship was. Who taught her what it felt like to be loved and cared for.

If only she had been faster at closing the gate, or...or had been there for him. Oh, how she wishes she could just trade places with him. That she would be the one to die so that he would be able to live. She would do anything, *anything*, if she could just see his smile again. See the way his whole face would light up brighter than the sun, his freckles like the stars in the sky. His eyes...his eyes that were always so warm and so loving that had looked at her as if *she* was the only girl in the world.

Now she would never see those eyes again.

And it *hurt*.

"Where is he? Where is Mike? *Where is my brother?!*"

Everyone turned towards the entrance of the hospital to see an almost hysterical looking Nancy demanding answers whilst a slightly-more-calm Jonathan tried to get her to calm down. Joyce Byers came in after them Will plastered to her side looking like death warmed over.

Hopper and Steve immediately stood up and walked over to the new arrivals. Joyce, once she saw Hopper started firing off questions. Nancy looked up at Steve and once she saw the look on his face she shook her head in denial, tears filling her eyes.

"No. Steve, please just tell me where my brother is. Steve. Please." Her voice broke on the last word.

"I'm so sorry Nance." Steve whispered his voice twisted in anguish. He gathered her in his arms. "He's gone."

"No. You're lying!" Nancy pushed him away shaking her head furiously. "He can't be gone!"

"The doctors tried everything Nance, he's gone." Steve said looking at her with the same amount of pain in his eyes. "I'm so sorry."

"What do you mean?"

JG: Sorry (not sorry) about the cliffy. You know how I love those.

Also: please forgive my ignorance with knots. I have no idea if those are the knots that would be used in this situation.

And as always thank you for your support!

3. Chapter 3: Heartbreak

Chapter III: Heartbreak

Everyone looked at Will, surprised that he had said anything. He had looked so tired and exhausted that they weren't sure if he had even been following the conversation.

"What do you mean Mike's gone?" Will asked again, a bit of panic bleeding into his eyes. "Gone where? When's he coming back?" He turned to Jonathan. "He's coming back right? Jonathan please tell me he's coming back!"

Jonathan let out a sob as he wrapped his arms around his brother. "Not this time bud. Not this time."

"No. NO." Will's voice broke as he finally registered what everyone was saying. "He can't be d-dead. He just can't be. He promised he'd always be there for me. He promised."

It seemed that this was too much for William Byers. With one last whisper of 'He promised' he fell against his brother in a dead faint. Jonathan, who was panicking if only slightly, looked around for a place for him to rest. A nurse who had been watching this whole scene with tears in her eyes walked over and quietly offered him to follow her to a nearby room. Once Will was situated Jonathan went back into the now very crowded waiting room.

As he walked out he saw that Steve and Nancy were talking away from the other kids who had dropped off into an exhausted slumber. Nancy was glaring at Steve coldly. "This is *your fault*." She spat angrily. "You told me that you would keep them safe Steve. And now my brother is dea-gone. My brother is gone because of your incompetence!" By the end of her speech she was yelling and looked like she was going to hit him.

Steve rocked back as if she really had hit him. His face, which Jonathan was startled to notice, looked like it had gone through a meat grinder. Steve's face pleaded for her to understand but his eyes

looked as if he believed her. "Nance I'm-

"DON'T." Nancy said sharply. "Just...just get out of my sight Steve. Please."

Steve flinched again but walked towards the exit without a backward glance.

"Nancy, it wasn't Steve's fault." Dustin whispered with tears in his eyes. "If anything, it was mine. I put ideas in his head."

It seemed that the kids weren't as asleep as he had assumed. Or at least the shouting had woken them up.

"It wasn't your fault honey." Joyce said softly.

"But it was!" Dustin said his voice rising in passion. "I'm the one who brought up the hivemind. If I had just stayed quiet then maybe he wouldn't have got it in his head to go and torch the graveyard."

"Bull." Lucas said lowly. "We both know that Mike would've stopped at nothing to help his friends." He sighed. "Besides, you weren't the one that was in front of him. I should've kept a closer eye on him. It's my fault."

"No."

Everyone looked at Eleven in surprise. They had thought that she was still asleep. But evidently not.

"It was my fault." Her voice broke and she looked at her lap biting a trembling lip. "I'm the reason he's g-gone."

"No, El, it's not your fault. There wasn't anything you could have done." Hopper said looking at this child that he had come to love.

"You're wrong! Don't you see?" She looked around at everyone before glaring at the ground. "The Mind Flayer knew that he was special to me. It knew that Mike would be my weakness. If it wasn't for me none of this would've happened in the first place! If I hadn't opened that gate Mike would still be alive!" On the last word her voice cracked and she broke into sobs again.

Dustin, being closest, pulled El into a hug that Lucas and Max quickly joined. The friends mourning for their fallen friend.

A quiet cough made the adults look up. It was the same doctor that had given them the news. His face was drawn and he seemed to be holding back tears at the amount of emotion in the room. "You can see him now if you wish."

Nancy, who had been leaning against Jonathan for support, immediately walked towards the doctor. Dustin, Lucas and El were not far behind her. Max decided to stay behind with Hopper and Joyce. Jonathan decided to go with Nancy to provide moral support.

The small group followed the doctor down into the morgue. Once there the doctor lead them to a table where there was a white sheet spread across a small body. The doctor walked over to the sheet and looked at the group with sympathy "This may be hard for you to see."

"Just do it." Nancy whispered her voice choked with tears.

The doctor nodded and pulled back the sheet slightly revealing the pale face of Michael Wheeler.

Nancy stifled a sob and quickly turned to bury her face in Jonathan's chest. She couldn't bear to see her baby brother like that. Mike, who was always smiling always seemed to have boundless energy couldn't be that cold unmoving body. She felt a thousand times worse than she had when she found out that Barb was dead.

Dustin and Lucas both stared at the pale body of their best friend in horror. They just couldn't believe that he was gone. Mike had always seemed larger than life. Seemed like he would stand the test of time and would always be there for his friends.

Jonathan stared at the body of his little brother's best friend in sorrow. He was always fond of Mike. Fond of the fact that Mike was such a good friend to his brother. Was always there when Will needed him. 'Not anymore' he thought with a pang.

Eleven walked forward slowly staring at the face of the boy she loved. He was too still. Too pale. This couldn't be her Mike. Couldn't

be the boy that had showed her the wonders of the world. The wonders of friendship and family and home. With a trembling hand she reached out and brushed a stray hair out of his face. "Mike...Please come back." She sobbed bowing her head over his chest. "I'm sorry. I am so sorry. Please just come back. You promised me you would be okay. Please Mike. Please."

JG: Short...but painful. Sorry.

Thanks for all of your support!

4. Chapter 4

JG: Hi everybody! Long time no see. Just a few things before you read more, this chapter has a mention of suicide (just a mention not actual suicide though don't worry) but that might be a trigger warning for some of you so I thought I'd warn you before hand. :) Now without further ado...

Chapter IV: Confrontations and a Surprise Visitor.

One Month Later

Time had passed slowly for those that were involved with -what people had been referring to as- the 'upside-down incident'. The first few days after Mike Wheeler's tragic passing were full of pain, guilt and accusations.

Karen Wheeler was inconsolable, mourning for her only son. Holly didn't quite get what was going on and would often ask where her "Mikey" was. This never failed to bring tears to the one she asked. Ted spent more and more nights away at work, or off on business trips. He couldn't deal with what he was feeling, so decided to just stay away. This lead to multiple fights between both Ted and Karen, and also between Ted and Nancy.

Nancy's emotions were all over the place. One minute she would be happy, remembering the fun times she had with her brother. The next she would be crying her eyes out from the pain of having lost Mike and for not being there when he needed her the most. Other days it was like Mike had never left and it all was just one really long nightmare. She also felt anger. Anger at Mike for doing something stupid and reckless, anger at Steve for not protecting him. Anger at herself for not being there for him. She couldn't even look at Steve because she still blamed him even though logically she knew that it wasn't his fault. But mostly she just missed her brother.

Dustin and Lucas were both depressed and listless, not wanting to do anything. The Dungeon and Dragons games were a thing of the past. No one wanted to play if they didn't have their paladin and game

master. Both of the friends were tormented by nightmares almost every night. Visions of seeing their friend dying over and over plagued their unconsciousness. His sightless eyes blaming them for not helping him sooner. Max hung out more with the boys trying to help them cope with the death of their lost friend. She and Lucas were together more often than not.

Steve still felt extremely guilty about the whole thing and often would wake up in a cold sweat dreaming about dark eyes looking at him with betrayal and loathing. Despite what others had told him, he truly felt that it was *his* fault that Mike was dead. He left things (like food, flowers, other gifts) at the Wheeler's house in an attempt to relieve his guilt but so far it hadn't worked. He couldn't even bring himself to go to the funeral. Not when he would have to see Nancy and the rest of her family's tear stained cheeks and accusing eyes. No, he skipped out on the funeral but came back to the grave sight every week with a small bouquet of field poppies and white lilacs.

Hopper had to be there for Eleven, but still felt the boy's loss keenly. Sometimes he would see kids biking down the street and his heart would clench knowing that Mike Wheeler wouldn't ever be able to do that again. Other times, when he would hear someone at the precinct say something that had to do with science or some other thing that the kid had enjoyed he had to take a moment to get himself under control again. But it was the times when at night he would hear El's sobbing and whispered pleadings for Mike to come back that truly broke his heart.

Joyce and Jonathan both felt Mike's loss as well. They had known Mike ever since the boy had been in kindergarten. They had seen him grow up along side Will and it felt horrible to realize that he wasn't going to ever come over to their house again. It was so wrong that someone so innocent and kind had to die. Mike truly had a heart of gold, and had loved and cared for his friends and family so much. And now...now he was gone. So yeah, Joyce and Jonathan took Mike's loss hard, but their grief was nothing compared to Will's.

When Will had first woken up at the hospital he had convinced himself that everything was fine and that Mike wasn't gone. It must've been a mistake, they swapped his body out with a fake like they had done with Will himself. Or...everyone was mistaken and he

went away to his grandparents or something.

He. Was. Not. Dead!

Why do people keep saying that?

Even at the funeral; that stupid funeral filled with people who didn't know him, didn't care. Not really anyway. Besides his family and those who were there that night, except Steve for some reason, there was no one that had truly known Mike Wheeler. Even then, he still didn't believe that Mike was truly gone.

No, it was when Lucas and Dustin had finally set him down and told him in detail—which probably wasn't a smart idea on their part looking back on it—what exactly had happened in the tunnels. His mom had been adamant that they wouldn't tell Will because he had, had enough to deal with as it was, but his two friends couldn't bare to watch Will's face light up with hope every time he'd see someone with black hair or wore a long sweater only to crumple in disappointment when it was never who he had thought it was. So, they told him. And it was then, staring into the faces of two of his closest friends, two people who wouldn't lie to him. Not about this, never about this. That he finally realized the truth.

Mike. Was. *Gone*.

And this time...this time Will didn't think that he was coming back.

And it *hurt*.

Eleven was nearly inconsolable. She cried herself to sleep every night after trying time after time to contact him. Through the radio, through the mind scape, mentally pushing herself to her breaking point just to see if she could catch a hint or whisper of him. But every time she was greeted with silence.

She would plead and plead for him to come back, to come back because he had *promised*. But nothing ever came. So, she would cry herself to sleep dreams haunted by dark eyes that shone like the sun and a galaxy of freckles, and a mop of unruly hair that was as soft as dandelion fluff.

She hardly remembers the funeral. It was just a haze of tears and pain. Hopper had snuck her out, knowing that there was no way that he was going to make her miss the funeral. To miss the opportunity to say goodbye to Mike.

One last time.

What she does remember is being hugged by Nancy, who tearfully told her how much Mike had loved her. She was hugged by Lucas, Dustin and Will. *That girl*, the one she saw with Mike, the one who had made her feel those *feelings* had been there too. She wasn't as happy about that, but after having a chat, she and Max came to an understanding.

She also remembers staring into the pale face of Michael Wheeler, the boy who had become her *home*, all stiff and silent and not being able to stop the sobs from coming. This was the boy who had snuck her into his home, and into her heart. The boy who had shown his favorite toys to her with an excited gleam in his eyes. Sharing his enthusiasm with that contagious smile of his. The boy who had called her every night and had never given up on her. The boy that had taught her about friendship, love, and had never lied to her.

So yes, the funeral was hard and she had to look away as he was lowered into the cold unforgiving ground.

-ST-

Will was not having a good day. Nightmares had kept him up most of the night, then was the added fact that he felt as if he was finally losing his mind because he kept seeing *him*. To top it all off when he had finally gotten to sleep he ended up sleeping through his alarm clock causing him to be late for school. Which if he was honest was the farthest thing from his mind right now, but still he could do without the pitying looks from the teachers and students.

"If we're both going crazy...we'll go crazy together right?"

Will's breath hitched and he forcibly shook that thought from his head. No. He wasn't going to think about *him*. Not now. Not here.

He was so preoccupied with his thoughts that he hadn't realized that he had made it to the classroom until the teacher, Mr. Clark, had asked him to sit down with a look of sympathy on his face.

"Hey Will, you okay?" Lucas's voice broke through his thoughts.

"Yeah," Will felt himself say even though he knew that he defiantly did not feel *okay*. "I just...didn't sleep well." He added at the disbelieving looks that were sent his way from his friends.

Dustin nodded. "Nightmares?"

Will looked sideways to the empty seat that had once belonged to his best friend. "Yeah, I kept hearing *him* call for me. But no matter where I looked I still couldn't find him."

Lucas swallowed and glanced at the seat as well, before looking away. "Yeah...I have those sometimes too." He rubbed at his eyes quickly.

Dustin sighed "Me too."

With that the three friends turned their attention to the teacher trying, once again, to pay attention and act like their whole world hadn't changed forever. But no matter what masks they put on no matter how many *lies* they told, they were not fine. They hadn't been since that night where their friend was taken from them.

But the world moved on, and they tried to move on as well. But they weren't sure they could, or that they even *wanted* to.

Still, they all had rolls to play so they would sit there and pretend to pay attention if only to make people stop staring at them. It didn't work.

People still stared. People still gawked. People still whispered behind their hands.

"Well if it isn't Midnight, toothless and the fairy."

Some people on the other hand, were more *vocal* about it than others.

All three boys ignored Troy and continued on their way towards lunch. They wouldn't give him a reaction knowing that it was the only thing that he wanted.

"What's the matter freaks? Still crying about Frogface Wheeler?"

All three boys froze and slowly spun towards Troy and his posy. Each of the boys were sporting faces of anger.

"Oh, looks like you hit a nerve Troy." James, Troy's right-hand man, snickered. "Look at the fairy, he looks like he's going to combust any second."

"You're right James, look at him." Troy laughed his pimpled face twisted into a sneer. "Pathetic."

"You know, they never said how Frogface died," James commented with a wicked grin. "You think it was that psycho freak? The one with the buzz-cut?"

Dustin and Lucas's fists were clenched and they looked seconds away from going over there and pounding his face in.

"Nah, he probably realized how much better off the world was without him and offed himself." Troy commented lazily. "I, for one, am quite *glad* that he did it. So, I don't have to see his ugly fa—"

His sentence was cut off when Will's fist met his face. Dustin and Lucas exchanged wide-eyed looks. Will, the smallest and the shyest one of the bunch had just decked Troy in the face.

Only he didn't stop there. The moment Troy was on the ground Will kept punching and hitting the boy over and over again. Muttering all the while "You stupid piece of—Take that back! Mike was more than you ever were you ugly acne ridden piece of—"

By now there was a sizable crowd hovering around them and chanting "Fight. Fight. Fight."

"Crap he's gonna kill him." Lucas said wide-eyed.

"So?" Dustin said with a grin. He sighed at the look that was sent his

way. "Fine. We won't let Will kill Troy."

With that said both of them pulled their small friend off of the other boy. Just as they had done this a teacher shouted for everyone to get back to lunch and to go about their business. Turning to the boys involved she stared at the boys with pursed lips and a furrowed brow.

"You five, principal's office now."

"But ma'am!" James said gesturing to the limp Troy hanging from his shoulder. "Look at him!"

The teacher gave Troy a sharp once over then nodded and sent the two boys straight to the nurse. Then she turned to the three friends. Spying Will's swollen knuckles, she sighed. "Sinclair, please take Byers to the nurse's office to have those knuckles looked at. Then come straight to the principal's office." She then turned to Dustin. "Henderson, you are coming with me to give a statement to the principal."

-ST-

Will blinked, slowly gathering his wits. After hearing those things Troy said it was like he had blanked out for a bit, everything surrounded by a red haze of anger. The first thing that he had noticed was that his hands were cold, looking down he soon found out why. A bag of peas wrapped in a towel covered his knuckles that were sure to be bruised and bloodied. He seemed to be seated in the chairs outside of the principal's office.

"What happened?" He asked looking sideways at Lucas who had been staring at him with an expression as if he didn't know wither to be concerned or amused.

Lucas's face settled on amusement. "You beat the crap out of Troy. You full on hulked out on him man."

"I did?" Will asked his eyes wide.

"You did, sent him to the hospital too. His nose was busted up man." Lucas said with a grin before his grin settled into a grimace. "I don't blame you though, I was seconds away from doing it myself."

Will smiled slightly. "Yeah?"

Before he could say anything the door to the office burst opened and Joyce Byers walked in her eyes seeking Will's the moment she walked in the door.

Once she saw that her youngest was fine other than some bruised knuckles she let out a small sigh of relief. Before hurrying over to where the two boys sat, giving Will a big hug as she did so.

"Will? Honey, what happened? The principal said something about a fight?" She asked looking at her son.

"It was Troy Mrs. Byers." Lucas explained with a sort of grimace. "He was talking crap about...about Mike." His voice broke slightly on his friend's name and he took a deep breath.

Joyce's eyes closed both from pain and anger at the fact that some stupid kid would do such a thing. Before she could say anything, the door opened and Dustin came out giving the three a grin. The principal gestured for Joyce and Will to stand up and come in the office.

Lucas and Dustin waved at their friend before heading back to class. Talking in low voices about what had happened. Will watched them go, dread settling in his stomach now that the situation had finally sunk in. He had beat the crap out of Troy. Troy was now in the hospital with a broken nose and perhaps more. He was going to be in *so much trouble*.

Sinking in the chair that was set out for him he looked up at the principal with more than a little bit of apprehension.

"Now, I'm sorry to have to call you down here like this Mrs. Byers, but when such a quiet student like Will strikes out at another student, well it's cause for concern."

Will felt his face flush slightly but couldn't bring himself to feel sorry for what he did to Troy. Not after what he had said about Mike.

Mike...

Tears came to his eyes but he forced them down not wanting to cry in front of his principal. He looked away blinking rapidly until he was sure the tears wouldn't fall before turning back to his principal and mother.

His mother was staring at him with understanding and empathy while his principal was looking at him with pity.

He smiled and cleared his throat awkwardly. "Sorry,"

The principal smiled at him. "That's alright Mr. Byers." She said before turning back to his mother. "Now, the fight happened shortly after lunch started, from several eye-witness accounts Mr. Hansen, and Mr. Williams instigated the fight. Will, Sinclair and Henderson didn't engage, according to witness reports, until after Mr. Wheeler's name was brought up. After a few more insults things took a turn for the worse when Mr. Hansen implied that Mr. Wheeler's death wasn't an accident. That he had—" The principal took a breath and continued tears pooling in her eyes. "That he had taken his own life."

"He said *What?*" Joyce cried jumping to her feet.

"Not to worry Mrs. Byers," The principal was swift to assure. "He will be punished most severely for both starting the fight and also for tarnishing another student's name."

"Good. That's good." Joyce said sitting back down again.

"Ma'am?" Will spoke up startling the two adults since he had been so quiet. "I was wondering if you could tell me what my punishment will be?"

The principal gave a soft disbelieving laugh at the fact that he was so polite about the whole thing. "Right. While I don't blame you for snapping, fighting is still against school policy. So, I'm afraid that you'll have to do three weeks' worth of Saturday detention."

"Yes ma'am." Will said breathing a quiet sigh of relief. He had honestly thought that it would have been worse. Saturday detention wasn't that bad.

After a few more moments of his mother talking to the principal Will

was told that he was allowed to go home early. On the way to the car Will was surprised to see that Hopper was waiting for them.

"Hopper? What are you doing here?" Joyce asked, evidently just as confused as her son.

Hopper took off his hat and ran a hand through his hair. "I heard about the fight, and thought I'd come and make sure Will and the boys were okay." He said before turning to Will. "How you holding up?"

Will shrugged self-consciously. "Okay...My knuckles are a bit sore I suppose."

Hopper winced in sympathy knowing first hand how sore he would be later. "Yeah, I'll bet."

"Hopper, it was nice of you to come and check to see if he's okay, but I think we're going to go now." Joyce said with a warm smile.

Hopper nodded stepping aside to let them gain access to the car. "Of course. If you need anything just call."

"We will." Joyce said with a nod and a smile. She got in the car and made sure that Will was situated before heading off.

-ST-

Will was dreaming. Of this he was certain. Whether this was going to be a nice dream or a nightmare was yet to be determined. Dreams were always changing, and what could be a perfectly nice dream about something so simple could turn into something sinister with very little effort.

Lately his dreams had very little light and happiness in them, things hadn't been the same. Ever since Mike...left his world had seemed darker more hopeless.

Mike had been the glue that held the party together, that held Will together. He had been the one that Will could confide in. He could tell Mike things that he couldn't tell the others. Mike was his confidant, his hero and his best friend.

And now...

Now he was alone.

Sure, he wasn't *actually* alone but it felt like it more often than not. He had his mom, but she was grieving for Bob and he didn't want to make her feel worse. Dustin and Lucas were there for him as well but they didn't...*couldn't* talk about *him*. About Mike.

Jonathan was there, but at the same time he wasn't. Not really. He mostly spent his time consoling Nancy.

Hopper was there more for his mother, and Max...well honestly, he didn't really know the girl all that well. So, it was hard for him to open up to her about things like this.

And Eleven... Well he she had gone back in hiding. But even if she hadn't gone back into hiding he still didn't know if he could talk to her about this. Like Max, he didn't know her that well. But she, at least knew Mike more than Max had.

Suddenly Will froze. He wasn't alone.

"Will?"

He spun around slowly. His heart in his throat. He *knew* that voice.

"Mike?"

JG: WOOOP THERE IT IS. Sorry I know I had left the last chapter on a cliffy buuuuut this seemed the best way of ending the chapter (for maximum DRAMA)

Also I used some flower symbolism because I'm a nerd. The two flowers that are used are Field Poppies which are used for remembrance of people who have died in war (and the war against the demo-dogs and the Mind Flayer counts right?) And White Lilacs which symbolize purity and innocence.

5. Chapter 5

JG: In light of the talented Finn Wolfhard's birthday I have decided to give you guys a chapter! This was originally supposed to be out on Christmas, but well, happy birthday Finn!

Chapter V: Ghostly Conversations pt 1

Will/Eleven

Suddenly Will froze. He wasn't alone.

"Will?"

He spun around slowly. His heart in his throat. He knew that voice.

"Mike?"

Will couldn't believe his eyes. Michael Wheeler was standing in front of him wearing the same striped shirt and blue pants that Will had last seen him in. He was smiling, all big and wide. The kind of smile that he had always reserved for his friends.

Tears poured down Will's cheeks as he stared at his best friend. "M-Mike? Is it really you?" He whispered hardly daring to believe it.

Mike nodded. "Yeah, it's me Will."

Rushing forward Will enveloped Mike in a bone-crushing hug, rejoicing in the fact that Mike was *here*. Will didn't care that he was a sobbing mess, it was Mike. Someone who would never judge Will. Mike was *back*. Finally, after long last Will pulled back and looked at his best friend rubbing a hand across his eyes.

"How are you here?" Will asked barely daring to hope. "I mean are you..."

"Alive?" Mike asked with a wry grin which turned into a sad frown. "I'm afraid not."

"Then...?" Will prompted his eyes filling with tears again.

"I will have to go back, but I...I just had to make sure you all were okay." Mike said with a smile.

"How can we be?" Will burst out glaring slightly at him, angry now at what Mike was saying. "You died. You *died* Mike. And you expect us to be 'okay'?" His hands were clenching and unclenching and he started to pace. "You...you were the glue that held us together Mike! How can we be okay when you're gone? When every day gets harder and harder without you there." He glared up at his best friend tears trailing down his cheeks. "You said you would be my friend forever. You promised me that you would be there. You *promised*."

Mike nodded, his face set in that compassionate look that he always had when one of the party came to him to vent. "I know. I did promise."

"Then how can you expect me to be okay? To move on without you here." His voice broke and he looked down at the ground. "I can't. I just can't Mike. It hurts too much."

Mike bit his lip and walked forward placing his hands-on Will's shoulders. "Will...Will look at me." Will brought his head up but wouldn't meet his friend's eye. Sighing Mike squeezed his friends shoulders a little to get his attention. "*Look* at me Will." Once Will's eyes were locked on his Mike continued his voice soft. "I know it hurts...*I know Will*. But no matter if I'm here physically or not I will always be your friend. Always. You never have to worry about that." He pulled his friend into another hug. "You're my best friend, and I'll always be there for you. Even if I'm not there physically. I am always watching out for you because that's what friends do. But you can't just spend your life wishing for me to come back. I don't want you to waste your life Will. I want you to go out and do something amazing. But you can't do that if you keep holding back because of me. If you hold yourself back because of all this guilt-which by the way is completely unnecessary. I don't blame you, never even crossed my mind to—then you can't do *anything* with your life. Please Will...I don't want to be the thing holding you back."

Will's shoulders shook with silent sobs. He knew what his friend was

saying was true-but that didn't make it any easier to hear. "I...I don't know if I can. But...I guess I could try."

Mike smirked a little bit then and, using his best Yoda impression, he spoke. "Do or do not. There is no try."

Will chuckled slightly, wiping away his tears. "You're such a dork."

Mike nodded. "True."

Will looked up at Mike again, his face falling slightly. "How much longer until you..." His voice broke off and he looked away biting his lip.

Mike frowned looking to the side. "Leave? Long enough to talk with all of you." He looked back at Will biting his lip in thought. "I'm going to need your help though."

"Anything."

"I'm going to need you to gather the party. Everyone who was involved with the upside-down incident. I need to talk to them." Mike said looking up at him.

"Okay, I'll call everyone on the supercom." Will said frowning in thought. "And I'll tell my mom, she'll tell Hopper..." His voice trailed off as he thought about the chief and his charge. "What about El?"

Mike flinched ever so slightly, pained at the thought of Eleven. "I'll talk to her. I was going to anyways after you. I just had to make sure that you were okay first, especially after what happened with Troy."

Will blushed slightly, his eyes unable to meet Mike's. "You saw that?"

"Oh yeah." Mike said his lips twitching into a grin. "Total badass."

Will grinned, finally looking up at his friend. "Yeah?"

"Uh-huh, man I thought Troy was going to pee himself." Mike chuckled at the memory before his face became soft. "Thanks."

"For what?" Will asked looking at his friend in confusion. What could

Mike be thanking *him* for?

"For sticking up for me I guess. Even though you got in trouble."

Will looked at Mike incredulously. "You're kidding right? Of course, I would stick up for you! You're my best friend! Who cares that I got in trouble? I would do it again even if it meant expulsion because that's what friends do." His eyes grew blurry again. "You taught me that."

Mike's own eyes were wet as well. "Well I'm proud to be your friend Will. And I'm proud of you."

A warm feeling swelled in Will's chest when he heard that. "Really?"

"Yeah," Mike said with a wide smile. "There isn't anything that you could do that would make me less proud of you."

Will's smile could've lit up the whole sky it was so bright. "Thanks Mike."

They hugged again before Mike pulled back looking apologetic. "I have to go now. Remember get everyone to come."

"I will," Will said with a bittersweet grin. "See you soon?"

Mike laughed. "Yeah, see you soon."

And with that he faded away and Will woke up with a gasp.

"MOM!" He cried out immediately. "Jonathan!"

There was an exclamation of surprise followed by a loud thump before Will's door burst open and both his mother and brother came through with varying degrees of concern on their faces.

"What is it honey? What's wrong?" His mom asked walking over to sit beside him.

"Call Hopper, Nancy and Steve." Will said urgently as he got up and searched for his supercom. "Tell them to come over as soon as they can..." He trailed off in frustration as he still couldn't find the radio. "Where did I put it? Come on!" He muttered under his breath.

"Will?" Jonathan asked looking thoroughly confused. "What's going on? Why do we need to call them? And what are you looking for?"

Will ignored his brother in favor of looking for the missing supercom. Spying the side of it hidden under a discarded shirt he let out an 'aha!' of excitement. "Lucas! Dustin! Come in. Over."

"Will? What's going on?" Dustin's voice crackled through the device, then he added as if an afterthought. "Over."

"I need you to come over ASAP." Will said quickly. "Over."

"What's happening? Over." Lucas asked.

"I talked to Mike!" Will said brightly, ignoring the startled looks that his family were giving him.

-ST-

Eleven sat in front of the television staring blankly. Normally she would be more invested in the soap opera that was currently playing, but ever since *he* left she hadn't been able to get into them as she once had. It just wasn't the same.

Sometimes she felt guilty for even enjoying herself by watching the silly TV shows. If *he* couldn't be happy why should she feel happy? Hopper, of course, had told her that she was wrong in thinking this. And that she was allowed to have joy and to feel happy even if Mike wasn't there to feel it with her, but she couldn't shake the feeling of guilt for being the one alive when by all means it should have been her.

She should have been the one to die. She was the one the Mind Flayer hated the most. She was the one that had opened the gate in the first place leading to Will's capture, Barb's death and a whole slew of other problems that had risen from her mistake of opening that stupid gate. And now, because of her, Michael Wheeler wasn't even *living* anymore.

El blinked when her vision started to go blurry. She hadn't noticed when she started crying. Honestly, she was surprised that she still could cry with the number of tears that she had shed since Mike's...

passing. She would've thought that they would have dried up by now.

Suddenly the television started to flicker. Feeling curiosity and a bit of hope bubble up inside her she got closer. Acting on instinct she changed the channel to the one that she usually used when accessing her powers, glancing around for something to cover her eyes she spied a scarf that had been discarded. Gently tying it around her eyes she focused and tried to tap into the power that she had been born with.

When she opened her eyes again and looked around the dark place the first thing she noticed was that she was alone. Always alone.

Wondering why she had been prompted to come here she started to wander around searching for the one she wanted to see the most. But no matter how far she went or how hard she wished she just couldn't find him.

Finally, hope gone, she fell to her knees and started to sob. She really needed to stop doing this. Every time she thought she could hear a faint voice or that she could feel a presence she would always search and search...but there was never anything there. Just blackness and pain.

"El?"

-ST-

"You *what?*" Lucas and Dustin's voices were both filled with shock and a little bit of skepticism. So great was there shock that they didn't even say the customary 'over'.

"I talked to Mike." Will repeated again, a smile at the thought of his friend coming over his face. "He visited me in my dream. Well...it was more than a dream because he was *there*. But yeah, he said that he wants to talk to all of us." He paused then added. "Over."

There were a few minutes of silence before Lucas spoke. "Are you sure it wasn't just a dream Will?"

Will huffed in annoyance, even though he knew that they would ask that question it still bugged him that they didn't believe him. "I'm

telling you guys! It's true. He was there and talked to me, and he asked me to get everyone together because he wanted to talk to us."

"But, Will, Mike's...dead." Dustin said voice breaking on the last word.

"*I know that.*" Will said, his voice sharper than he meant it to be. "I know. Just... trust me guys. Please."

"Alright." Lucas sighed sounding rather sad. "I'll be over as soon as I can. Over." Dustin also promised that he would be there.

Will smiled before remembering that Mike had said everyone. "Wait Lucas! Bring Max will you? Mike said he wanted everyone. Over."

"Wait...he wanted to talk to *Max*?" Lucas asked disbelief in his voice. "I thought he hated her."

Will frowned. "I'm sure he doesn't *hate* her, he just...didn't want to replace El."

"We weren't replacing El!" Lucas exclaimed.

"I know that," Will said soothingly. "But he felt like you were."

"Right," Lucas said before sighing. "Well I guess I better go and get her. Over."

"See you soon, over and out."

-ST-

Eleven's head snapped up so fast it was a wonder that she didn't get whiplash. As it was, even if she had gotten whiplash she probably wouldn't have felt it, considering who was in front of her.

"Mike?" She breathed half convinced that she was seeing things or was dreaming.

Mike smiled, his eyes lighting up at the sight of her. "Yeah, it's me."

"MIKE!" She screamed tackling him in a hug, the force of which

caused him to fall to the ground.

"Careful," Mike chuckled, his eyes never leaving her face.

"Sorry," El said smiling bashfully.

"It's okay," Mike assured her with a squeeze.

"Is...is this real?" El asked tentatively, hoping against hope that it was. That he was really here. Sitting up she watched him half expecting him to disappear. But he didn't, he just sat up scooting over so that they were side-by-side.

"Yeah, it's real. I'm here." Mike said his face growing soft.

"Does this mean—Will you come—" She started to say but wasn't able to get the words out.

Mike frowned. "Unfortunately, I'm not back for good."

"Oh," El said softly, her heart aching at the thought of him leaving again.

Mike's hand came up and gripped her chin pulling it up so that she could meet his eyes. "El, I'm sorry. I know you want me to come back. I do too but I can't. That's not how things work. Maybe in comic books but not here. Not in real life."

"But it hurts. It hurts *so much*." El said, her voice shaking.

He gathered her into his arms, hugging her tight and placing a kiss on her head. "I know it does. And I wish I could take that hurt away from you."

El clung to him, trying to memorize this moment. To commit it to memory, knowing it would be the last that she saw of him for a long time. Breathing in the smell that was unique only to him, she smiled and felt her sobs start to fade. He always had that effect on her. Something about him calmed her down.

They sat there holding each other for a time, neither wanting to let the other go. Content to just sit in silence and bask in each other's

presence.

"I'm sorry," El whispered, eyes clenched tight still convinced that it was her fault that he had died.

"No, El." Mike said his grip tightening slightly. "It wasn't your fault. *Any of it.*"

She looked up at his face wondering how he could still defend her. "Yes, it is Mike. Don't you see? I opened the gate, I unleashed the Demogorgon. I got Barb, Benny, Bob—" Her voice cut off and she had to take a deep breath before continuing. "You. I got you killed. You all died because of *me.*"

Mike scowled slightly. "No. It's not your fault. Brenner forced you to look for the Demogorgon, he caused you to be so frightened that you *accidentally* opened the gate, he killed Benny. The Demogorgon...the Demogorgon was controlled by the Mind Flayer. *He* is the reason Bob and Barb are dead. It was on *his* orders that those demo-dogs got me. None of this was your fault. So, don't blame yourself okay?" He brushed a stray curl out of her face. "I don't."

She looked up at him, her eyes shining. "Really?"

"Of course." Mike said as if it were obvious. "How could I? There's nothing to blame you for."

Suddenly, overcome with emotion El reached up and kissed him. He stiffened in surprise before relaxing into the kiss. El pulled back, a smile on her face as she rested her head against his. It was...nice...kissing him.

"Wow," Mike breathed his eyes looking a little dazed.

"Good?" She asked with a small giggle.

"Really good." Mike said his grin bright enough to light the sky.

El smiled before frowning slightly. "How long can you stay?"

Mike paused, not wanting to go but knowing that he probably should. "Not much longer. I've only come to check in on everyone.

And...and to say goodbye. Since I didn't really get the chance before."

El nodded, biting her lip to keep herself from crying again. "Okay. Do...do you need my help?"

Mike smiled and nodded. "Yeah, I need you to tell Hopper, and make sure he get's a hold of Nancy."

El smiled slightly though it was sad. "I will."

Mike gave her another hug, his face buried in her curls. He didn't want this to end but knew that it would have to sooner or later. "El, before I go I want to tell you something."

She looked at him curiously, eyes never leaving his face. "What is it Mike?"

Mike gave her a dopy smile. "You are the bravest, strongest and most beautiful girl I know. And I will always be grateful to have met you. I know it's going to be hard to move on, but...but I don't want you to be held back by me. I need you to live your life to the fullest. Go and explore the world, find the things you like and dislike. Do something amazing. Just be happy."

El felt tears trail down her cheeks as she stared at the boy in front of her, her heart full of love towards him. "Okay. Okay I'll do my best."

Mike's hands came up to cup her face, his thumb rubbing the tears away. "I love you Eleven. I will always love you."

Eleven smiled, her cheeks hurting with the force of it, but not caring because she felt so happy. "I love you too Mike. Always."

JG: There. I gave you some fluff. Bittersweet fluff, but fluff non the less.

And since because it happened and I wanted to share, here have some bloopers.

Will looked up at Mike again, his face falling slightly. "How much longer until you..." His voice broke off and he looked away biting his lip.

Mike frowned looking to the side. "Counting this one? Three, four

chapters at the most."

6. Chapter 6

The Gate Au

Chapter VI: Ghostly Conversations Part 2

Dustin/Lucas/Max

Lucas was someone who relied on logic and didn't put much stock in things that were contrary to what he knew and believed. So, this whole thing with the upside-down and the Demogorgon/demo-dogs with telekinetic girls was a little hard to swallow. But it was manageable. Hard to believe, but manageable.

But hearing Will talk about Mike coming back *from the dead* to talk to him and that he wanted to talk to everyone...well it was just a little too much to take in. It was a well-known fact that you cannot come back from the dead. And anyone who said other wise were either lying or a mental institution patient.

So, it was concerning to hear this coming from one of his best friends. Because Lucas knew that Will wouldn't lie about something this important. Which left the second option...something which Lucas really hoped was not true. But, unfortunately, could very well be true. With all that had happened to Will over the course of...well the past year to be honest, it wouldn't be that much of a stretch to say that Will had lost his mind.

But still, he might as well go and show his support. Maybe even get through to Will and knock some sense into him. Make him see the horrible truth, Mike was gone and wasn't coming back. As much as it pained him to admit, Mike was gone. And there was nothing they could do about it. No matter how much they wished that he would come back it just wasn't going to happen.

So, he snuck out and hopped onto his bike heading towards Max's house. Hoping that her evil step-brother wasn't there. Because that would just complicate things unnecessarily. Once he was there he tapped on her window and waited for her to answer.

"What is it stalker?" She said with a smirk.

"It's Will," Lucas said, his mouth twitching slightly despite how serious this was. "He said we need to meet at his house. All of us."

Max nodded and climbed out her window after grabbing a jacket just in case. "Did he say why?" She asked walking over to his bike.

Lucas took a deep breath knowing how strange it sounded. "He said that he talked to Mike."

Max's head snapped up to look at him in astonishment. "He said *what?*"

"Yeah," Lucas said his voice pinched with worry. "He also said that Mike wanted to talk to us. *All* of us."

-ST-

Dustin stared at his supercom in disbelief. Will couldn't have seen Mike. It just wasn't possible. But at the same time, he knew his friend and he knew that he wouldn't lie about something as big as this.

'But what if he wasn't lying just mislead.'

Dustin sighed at that thought before nodding to himself. Even if Will was mistaken he would still be there for his friend. But at the same time there was a part of Dustin that hoped that Will was right. That Mike was back and wanted to talk to them. It was that chance, that hope that made Dustin bike as fast as he could to the Byers house.

Arriving just as Lucas and Max pulled up he got off his bike, dropping it to the side carelessly as he went, and pounded on the door.

Mrs. Byers opened the door looking a little hassled. Her hair looked as if she had been raking her hands through it constantly. She smiled, although it was more of a grimace, at the three teens and beckoned for them to come in. "Will is in his room, if you want to talk to him."

With a nod of thanks, the three friends walked into Will's room. Dustin watched as Will colored a picture, something that he hadn't done in a while. Will looked happier than he had in a long time. Ever

since Dustin and Lucas had told him what happened that night in the tunnels Will had been distraught and hopeless. Now it was the complete opposite. Although there was still some sadness in his eyes, it was as if he found peace.

"Hey Will," Dustin called causing Will to look up from what he was drawing.

"Dustin!" Will said with a grin, putting down his drawing pad and giving his friend a high-five. "Lucas, Max glad you could make it."

"What, if you don't mind me asking, are we doing here?" Max asked looking around at Will's bedroom in interest.

Will glared lightly at Lucas. "Didn't you tell her? I thought you were going to tell her!"

Lucas glanced at Dustin. "Will..."

"Don't 'Will' me!" Will said annoyance in his voice. "Mike really did talk to me."

"But Will," Lucas said his voice pained. "Mike's dead. And he can't come back."

"You're wrong. He did come back, he came back to talk to me. To all of us!" Will said his voice rising.

Mrs. Byers popped her head in looking at the kids with a smile. "Is everything okay in here?"

"Yes Mrs. Byers!" Dustin said brightly as every one else nodded.

"Okay," Mrs. Byers said before looking at her son. "Will, honey, Hopper said that he was coming over with El."

Will nodded but then frowned in thought. "What about Nancy and Steve? They need to be here too!"

"Jonathan said he would get Nancy. And Hopper said that Steve was coming separately."

"Good. Mike said that he wanted everyone." Will said nodding to himself before walking out of his room to wait for the others.

Lucas, Max and Dustin shared looks at their friend's stubbornness before they too went out into the living room. About twenty minutes later there was a knock on the door and Mrs. Byers opened it to reveal Hopper and Eleven.

Giving Mrs. Byers a quick hug Eleven went over to the rest of the party. "He hasn't come yet has he Will?"

"Not yet," Will said coming forward to give her a hug. "He should be here soon though."

"Wait, hold up." Lucas said looking at the both of them. "You're in on this too El?"

Eleven tilted her head curiously. "In on what?"

"This!" Lucas said gesturing around him. "The whole 'Mike's back from the dead' thing."

Will scowled at his friend, upset that he didn't believe him. "I'm not lying Lucas! He talked to me!"

"But didn't you say it was a dream?" Max asked.

"It wasn't a dream!" Will snapped before taking a deep breath. "I mean yes it was but it was different than a normal dream. He really was there."

"It's true." Eleven spoke up cutting off whatever Lucas was about to say. "Mike really did come back."

"You had the same dream too?" Dustin asked his eyes bright with curiosity.

Eleven shook her head. "Not a dream, went to the mind scape."

"Mind scape?" Max repeated blankly. "What's that?"

"It's the place she goes when she uses her powers to look for people,

right El?" Dustin asked remembering when they made the sensory deprivation tank.

El nodded happy that Dustin helped her find the words. "Yes, that place. He was there."

"And you're sure it wasn't just a dream?" Lucas asked voice still skeptical.

"Yes." Eleven and Will said in unison.

"Works for me," Dustin said brightly. Shrugging at the looks sent his way.

Before anyone could say anything else the door opened and Jonathan was leading Nancy into the house. Nancy looked as if she had been crying again. Her eyes were rimmed with red, hair tied haphazardly into a ponytail.

"Nancy!" Joyce said coming forward and giving the girl a hug. Nancy was chatting with Joyce and Hopper or at least they were chatting with her and she was just giving the occasional mumble.

Once again there was a knock at the door and in came Steve Harrington. Nancy, who had caught sight of Steve, gasped and shouted, "What is *he* doing here?"

Steve winced as if her words were a physical blow. "I should go."

"Wait!" Eleven grabbed Steve's arms to make sure he wouldn't leave. "Mike specifically said for *everyone* to come."

"Wait—*what?*" Nancy and Steve asked at the same time.

"Eleven, Mike's gone." Nancy said giving a pointed glare at Steve.

Just as Eleven opened her mouth to say something the lights started to flicker. Will and Eleven exchanged excited looks. "He's coming!"

Everyone else was looking around, some fearing that the demo-dogs were back and that the gate had opened again. Others were quietly hopeful that Mike was in fact coming back. Once, twice, three times

the lights flickered until they finally went out.

"What was that?" Max whispered looking around in alarm.

Her only answer was the lights coming back on. Everyone gasped, standing there was Mike Wheeler.

"Hey guys," Mike said awkwardly scratching the back of his neck.

"MIKE!" Dustin and Lucas yelled rushing forward to embrace their friend.

Mike laughed as he hugged his friends, tears running down his cheeks. "Hey guys,"

"M-Mike? Is—Is that really you?" Nancy asked her voice trembling.

Mike turned to his sister with a grin. "Yeah Nance, it's really me."

Nancy rushed forward and pulled her brother into a crushing embrace. She was trying to talk but couldn't get any words through her sobs.

At this point there wasn't a dry eye in the Byers house. Even Hopper was crying as he watched the siblings reunite. They didn't know why exactly he was here, but they were just happy to see him again.

Finally, after a while, Mike pulled back and looked at everyone. "Um, thanks for coming you guys. I know it was probably hard for some of you to come without any proof. But it really means a lot to me that you would come anyway."

"Of course, we would come honey," Joyce said warmly.

Mike smiled at her before continuing. "I know you guys have questions." Those seemed to be the magic words, for they all started speaking over each other in their questions. Mike laughed and held up his hands. "One at a time. One at a time please."

Once they were all quiet Nancy asked the first question. "Are you—are you going to stay?"

Mike gave a sad smile. "No, I'm afraid not Nance. I only came back to say goodbye."

"How long do you have?" Lucas asked, tears coming to his eyes.

"Not long." Mike said before grabbing Lucas's arm and dragging him away from the group smiling at the others before turning to his best friend. "Lucas, I need you to know it *wasn't* your fault. I never have blamed you for it and I won't ever blame you. So please, *please* stop beating yourself up for this."

Lucas bit his lip fighting back sobs. "I c-can't help it Mike. You were right behind me, I could have...no I *should've* made sure you were still following me. But I didn't. I just left you."

Mike reached out and pulled his friend into a hug. "It's okay Lucas. *It's okay.* You didn't know."

They stood there taking comfort in each other for a few minutes before Lucas pulled back. "Will said that you were afraid that Max was trying to take El's place."

Mike shifted uncomfortably. "I did...at first. You two seemed to be so wrapped up in getting to know the new girl, and it was like you were just *moving on* and I didn't want—" His voice broke and he looked down. "I just missed El so much and it felt like you were just...just... *replacing* her. I couldn't bear it. I guess in my mind making friends with her was finally accepting that El was *gone* you know? And I didn't want that to happen." He sighed and sat down on a nearby chair. "But then I realized that she wasn't trying to take El's place. That she just wanted to have friends. And I was ashamed, ashamed at how I had treated her and I guess I didn't want to admit I was wrong."

"Oh," Lucas mumbled.

"Yep," Mike said with a laugh. "Lucas?"

"Yeah Mike?"

"Promise me you'll move on? That you won't feel guilty?"

"I—I'll try Mike." Lucas said with a sigh.

"Thank you." The two friends embraced before Mike turned to where the others were trying not to eavesdrop. "Dustin, come here please."

Dustin grinned at his friend before coming over and giving Mike a friendly punch on the shoulder. "Something you need buddy?"

"Yeah, you to stop blaming yourself." Mike said with a small smirk.

"But Mike—"

"No Dustin," Mike broke in, his voice turning serious. "Listen to me. *It Is. Not. Your. Fault.*"

"But I reminded you about the hive-mind fact. I'm the one who—"

"Who full on tackled a demo-dog to try and save me!" Mike exclaimed. "And besides even if you did bring up the fact of the hive-mind I still would have gone out there anyway. So, don't beat yourself up over it. I don't blame you. At all."

Dustin smiled at his friend, tears in his eyes. "Thanks Mike."

"Anytime." Mike grinned at his friend before calling for Max to join them.

-ST-

Max wasn't sure what to think anymore. If you had told her a week ago that someone would visit her from beyond the grave she would've think told you to go to a psych ward or something similar because that *just doesn't happen*.

Until it did.

Because apparently the laws of reality don't work for Michael Wheeler. This was all just too surreal. She couldn't believe that he was actually back from the dead. Maybe not forever, but back from the dead all the same.

And now he was wanting to talk to her. Which, was surprising in

itself, because to her knowledge he didn't like her very much. In fact, she would've bet that he hated her.

"Is there something you wanted to say Wheeler?" She asked, curious but cautious. She didn't want to be snapped at again.

"I wanted to apologize." Mike said his voice sincere. "I'm sorry how I treated you. I acted pretty douchey."

Max grinned slightly. "Yeah, you did."

Mike laughed. "I deserve that." He scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I really am sorry though. I was going through a rough time, and kind of felt that you were trying to take El's spot. That you were...I don't know *replacing* her I guess. But I was wrong to think so, and for that I am sorry. I also want you to know that you definitely are our zoomer."

Ohmygosh! I'm so sorry for the wait guys! I've been distracted by other things! Also, sorry for the short chapter. I've been stuck and unmotivated and such. But only three more chapters to go then it will be done! :)

7. Chapter 7

The Gate Au

Chapter VII: Ghostly Conversations Part 3

Nancy/Steve/Jonathan

Mike laughed. "I deserve that." He scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I really am sorry though. I was going through a rough time, and kind of felt that you were trying to take El's spot. That you were...I don't know replacing her I guess. But I was wrong to think so, and for that I am sorry. I also want you to know that you definitely are our zoomer."

Max grinned at the group's paladin. "Thanks Mike."

Mike smiled before turning to look at his sister and the two other teens that were seated awkwardly on some chairs. Nancy, who had been looking over every so often, locked eyes with her brother and Mike felt his heart twist at the pain in her gaze.

"Mike."

Despite being across the room Mike heard Nancy's voice loud and clear.

He walked forward grinning at his sister a little sheepishly. "Hey Nance."

Once Mike was close enough Nancy pulled her brother into a tight embrace, tears falling on her cheeks. "Oh Mike. I'm so sorry."

Mike looked at her curiously. "What do you have to be sorry for? You didn't do anything wrong."

Nancy shook her head in protest. "I should've just stayed with you then I could have—"

"Could've gotten killed the same as me." Mike cut in giving her a look. "Or you could've helped but, Nance, you can't be hung up on

what-if's or 'could-have-done's. It's only going to drive you mad."

"But—" Nancy started to stay but stopped as Mike's grip on her arms tightened.

"It's okay Nance. I don't blame you. At all." He grinned at her with watery eyes. "And neither does Barb."

Nancy gasped at her friend's name, a sob catching in the back of her throat. "You—you talked to Barb?"

Mike nodded giving his sister a small bittersweet smile. "Yeah, she wanted to come too but well..." He trialed off with a shrug. "She told me to tell you that it wasn't your fault that she died so stop beating yourself up about it."

Nancy gave a chuckle that was more of a sob. "O-okay."

Mike smiled again before turning to look at Steve. Steve wouldn't meet his eyes and just looked at the ground guiltily.

"Harrington," Mike said, his voice soft and yet firm.

Steve glanced at his face before looking away just as fast. "I'm sorry."

Nancy just glared at him silently from behind Mike. *Logically she knew that he wasn't to blame just as much as she was, but she was still upset and wanted to blame someone.* Plus, Steve wasn't exactly helping matters as he obviously felt the same.

"Why?" Mike asked simply.

"Because—" Steve's voice faltered, and he had to visibly pull himself together again. "Because I couldn't keep you safe. I failed, and you were...you died." He clenched his eyes shut as the tears slid down his cheeks. "And I'm just *so sorry*."

Mike put a hand on his shoulder. "I shouldn't have to say this because it's not even your fault anyway but—" He stopped, giving Steve a glare as he went to protest before continuing on. "But I know you won't believe that so: I forgive you."

Steve gasped looking at Mike like he had grown another head. "W-what?"

Mike grinned at the stupefied teenager. "*I. Forgive. You.*"

Steve stared at the shorter boy in shock. He couldn't believe that Mike had forgiven him so easily. "But—"

"No, no 'buts'. I forgive you. Steve Harrington so you need to stop beating yourself up about something that wasn't even your fault." Mike interrupted giving the basketball star a stern look.

Steve cracked a grin. "Yes sir."

Rolling his eyes Mike turned to Jonathan, who had been standing awkwardly to the side. He gave him a grin. "Hey Jon, thanks."

Jonathan blinked, not expecting that. "What?"

"Thanks, for being there for being there for Nancy." Mike's smile widened. "She needed someone and I'm glad she had you."

"Oh, right. Y-yeah of course." Jonathan said, scratching the back of his neck bashfully.

"You'll keep an eye on her and Will, when I'm gone right?" Mike's eyes turned pained at the thought of leaving his family. "Please Jonathan."

Giving him a small smile Jonathan nodded. "Of course, Mike."

"Good."

JG: Right so, I'm sorry for the really short length. But we've only got two more chapters to go so...yeah. Also thank you for sticking with me through the long wait. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting!

And as always, thank you for all your reviews, favorites and follows! You guys are the best!

8. Chapter 8

The Gate Au

Chapter VIII: Ghostly Conversations Part 4

Joyce/Hopper

Finally, Mike turned to the two adults that had migrated to the back of the room and were conversing among themselves. Joyce smiled at him, her eyes bright. She saw Mike and the other two boys as her other children. So, it warmed her heart to see Mike again even if she knew it wouldn't last.

"Hey sweetie," Joyce said giving him a hug when he was close enough. "H-how are you doing? Are you doing okay?" Mike grinned at her and Joyce couldn't help but smile back.

"I'm okay Mrs. Byers. Honest." Mike said dutifully.

"Good, that's good." Joyce ruffled his hair playfully.

Mike looked up at her and quietly asked. "What about you? Are *you* okay Mrs. Byers?"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about me Honey," Joyce said her smile dimming a bit. "I-I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" Mike asked looking at her with a hint of worry in his eyes. "Because it's okay if you're not. It's okay to be sad if you need to. I won't judge you." He grinned slightly. "And neither does Bob."

Joyce felt her breath catch in her throat and she looked at him uncomprehendingly for a moment. "What?"

Mike shrugged. "Bob talked to me. He told me to tell you that it's okay and he hopes you can move on and find someone to make you happy."

Joyce hugged him again, her shoulders shaking with the force of her

sobs. "T-thank you for telling me Michael."

"You're welcome Mrs. Byers." Mike said patting her on the back soothingly. He turned towards Hopper, a hesitant smile on his lips. "Hey Chief."

Hopper smiled, glad to see that the kid was doing okay. Considering. "Hey kid."

Mike stepped away from Joyce as Jonathan came over and took his mother. Mike was left standing in front of Hopper feeling suddenly a little bit embarrassed.

"I'm sorry," Mike said his head ducking slightly.

Hopper blinked, not expecting that at all. "What do you have to be sorry about kid?"

Mike's cheeks reddened. "For yelling at you and all of those things I said before." He looked up. "I really don't hate you, you know I was just—"

Hopper chuckled, cutting Mike off before he started to babble. "Oh that? It's fine kid. I mean, I'll forgive you if you forgive me for lying about El." Hopper held out his hand. "Deal?"

Mike grinned, vastly relieved that Hopper had forgiven him. "Deal."

As they shook hands Hopper pulled Mike into a hug, eyes clenching shut as he remembered that night. "I'm sorry you didn't get to spend more time with her Wheeler. For what it's worth I'm glad that you were there for her."

Mike grinned at him through misty eyes. "Thanks Chief."

Hopper grinned tousling his hair affectionately. "I'll miss you kid."

Mike chuckled through his tears. "Me too Chief, me too."

"Mike." El's voice caused him to spin around, coming face-to-face with the telekinetic.

"Yeah El?" Mike asked giving her a bright but tear-stained smile.

"Do you really have to go?" She asked, eyes sad.

Mike nodded somberly. "Yeah El. I really do have to go."

Eleven hugged him tight wanting to never let him go again but knowing that she had to. "I'm going to miss you Mike. So much."

Mike smiled and wiped away the tears from her face. "I'll miss you too." He looked back at all of his friends and family. "I'll miss all of you."

After another round of hugs and goodbyes Mike left in another flash of light.

"Mom?" Will asked from his place in his mother's arms.

"Yeah Will?" Joyce asked grinning down at him.

"Mike's going to be okay, isn't he?"

Joyce nodded. "Yes Will. Mike is going to be okay. And so, will we."

The End

Wahoo so we're finally done with the main bulk of the story! All that's left is the epilogue and then it's finished! Wooo!

Thank you whoever read, reviewed, favorited and all that jazz! You all rock! :)

9. Chapter 9

The Gate Au

Chapter IX: Letters to Mike

Dear Mike,

I know this seems kind of silly to write letters to you, while...while you're somewhere I can't follow. But Mrs. Byers suggested that writing down what I'm feeling could help. I'm not entirely convinced that it will, but I decided to give it a chance. Plus, it makes me feel closer to you.

Nancy and Steve haven't made up yet. They are trying though and that's what really matters right? I do hope that they can forgive each other soon and end the fighting.

Your parents split up last week. I think Will called it a 'Divorce'? It seems your mom had, had enough and kicked your father out. Nancy seemed both happy and upset about it. But its okay, Jonathan was there for her. Speaking of Jonathan, he is also keeping an eye on Will. I guess he took your last words to heart.

Will, Dustin and Lucas are okay. Or, at least, as okay as they can be in this situation. They are sleeping better. It's not completely a hundred percent better, but still better than before.

I miss you Mike. I miss you so much it hurts. And I know that you said I should forgive myself but sometimes my brain taunts me over and over saying that you died... because of me. But I'm trying Mike. I'm trying to... to forgive myself and then maybe I'll be able to accept that it wasn't my fault. I don't know.

I better get to bed now. I love you Mike.

-El

Dear Mike,

Hopper has been acting strange lately. Well, maybe not strange, but he seemed excited about something? I'm not sure. He's been spending a lot of

time with Mrs. Byers though. Dustin says that means they are dating which is a step away from getting hitched. Whatever that means.

I asked Hopper and Mrs. Byers about it but they just started spluttering and blushing. I think they were embarrassed. I'm not sure why though.

Talk to you later

-El

Dear Mike,

Great news! Nancy and Jonathan were able to make sure that the lab where Papa was, was able to be shut down for good! They originally planned to get it shut down sooner, but Nancy had been too upset about you to do anything about it. But now she says that she was able to get justice for both you and Barb. Although she still misses you a lot she seems better. She's even being nicer to Steve.

Speaking of Steve, he's been hanging out with the boys more. Him and Dustin are particularly close. Which is odd, but strangely fitting. Lucas joked that Steve's the party's new tank. I'm not entirely sure what that is but Steve seems happy when he's called it.

Have to go, Hopper is calling me for dinner.

Love El

Dear Mike,

Hopper was acting funny today. He seemed nervous about something. I asked him if he wanted to marry Mrs. Byers but he only turned red and changed the subject. Dustin says it's only a matter of time.

Speaking of a matter of time, I wonder how much longer it will take until I'm able to go outside again. Soon I hope. I want to see the others again.

Love El

Dear Mike,

Mike! You know how Hopper was acting weird yesterday? Well, I finally

got him to talk and you'll never guess what happened! He's said that he adopted me! I get to be part of his family now! Well at least legally I mean, I already sort of was part of his family but now it's official. They changed my name to the name mama gave me. So now I'm Jane Hopper.

Love El

(or Jane now I guess)

Dear Mike,

I can finally go outside now! It feels like forever since I was able to go outside. I'm only sad that I wasn't able to spend it with you. Still, I've got the boys, and Nancy too I guess. Lucas and Dustin have been trying to get me to get to know the new girl Max.

I don't know if we'll be friends but... I'll try.

Love Jane

Dear Mike,

I've changed my mind about Max. She's cool. Those stupid mouth-breathers that had bothered you before, decided to pick on Dustin and Lucas. (Will was home sick with a cold, so I don't think they would have picked on them otherwise. Dustin says they're scared of Will. I'm not sure why) I guess they didn't realize I was there, so they started threatening Lucas and Dustin. Before I could step in Max punched them both in the gut. She also stood up for you. Said that you were more of a man than they would ever be. She even got them suspended! Dustin really thought she was badass. Lucas asked her on a date. (finally)

Love Jane

Dear Mike,

Nancy has finally forgiven Steve, and they've gone back to being friends. Now all Steve needs to do is forgive himself. He is trying though. I'm glad that they were able to forgive each other. They might be able to move on now.

I miss you every day.

Love Jane

Dear Mike.

Hopper and Mrs. Byers are getting married! Hopper finally asked her, and she said yes! They've even set the date.

Lucas said that this means Will is going to be my brother now. I've never had a brother. I wonder what it will be like?

Love Jane

Dear Mike,

Well Hopper and Mrs. Byers are now officially married. I wish you could've seen it. It was so beautiful. Dustin cried, even thought he denied it when Will asked him.

Even though we miss you every day it's been getting a little easier.

We just have to keep taking life one day at a time.

I love you and will never forget you Michael Wheeler.

Love Jane.

THE END